

WHAT IS *FORMOSUM* IN COPA 33?\*

*hic age pampinea fessus requiesce sub umbra  
et grauidum roseo necte caput strophio,  
†formosum† tenerae decerpens ora puellae  
a pereat cui sunt prisca supercilia!* (31–34)

This note discusses the line 33 of Pseudo-Virgil's *Copa*: *formosum tenerae decerpens ora puellae*. This line opens with *formosum* which is considered, almost universally, as corrupt and thus identified by obeli marks in critical editions of the poem.<sup>1</sup>

The reading *formosum* was defended by F. Buecheler.<sup>2</sup> He interpreted it as a neuter accusative used adverbially which refers to *decerpens*. To support his interpretation, Buecheler quoted the following examples: *perfidum ridens* (Hor. C. 3,27); *pavidum blandita* (Ov. Met. 9,69); and *salve aeternum*. But none of these is appropriate: in fact, *perfidum* is an internal accusative ('laughing a treacherous laughter')<sup>3</sup>; *pavidum* is an adjective referring to the *famulus* of the previous verse (*deque suis unum famulis pudibunda vocavit / et pavidum blandita 'fer has, fidsime, nostro' dixit ...*), who shortly afterwards (v.576) is also described as scared (*trepidantis ab ore ministri*); *aeternum* is an accusative of extension in time. But also the sense that was obtained in Buecheler's interpretation – *formosa basiatio* (as he himself put it) – is somewhat odd, so most scholars still regard the text as corrupt.

The reading *formosus*, present in some twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuscripts, should also be rejected as lacking sense. A form of the adjective *formosus* should refer, as one might expect, not to the *viator*, but to the girl or to her lips, as in a passage of Ov. Am. 2,15,17: *umida formosae tangam prius ora puellae* that the author of *Copa* could have known. Thus V.W. Clausen suggested two emendations that would mean this sense:

*formosa et tenerae decerpens ora puellae*

or

*formosa interea decerpens ora puellae*<sup>4</sup>

In both Clausen's proposals the corruption can be explained paleographically. In the first one, however, one could question the *et* with the participle *decerpens* after *necte* in the previous verse (*et grauidum roseo necte caput strophio, / formosa et tenerae decerpens ora puellae*). In Clausen's second conjecture one could object that the *interea* is redundant, since it repeats the sense implied in the present participle *decerpens*.

\*) I am indebted to my colleagues Mikołaj Szymański and Konrad Kokoszkiewicz for their discussion of an earlier draft of this paper.

1) See E.J. Kenney, Appendix Vergiliana, Oxford 1966 (OCT) (hereafter: Appendix), 82.

2) F. Buecheler, Coniectanea, RhM 45, 1890, 234.

3) See OLD, 1338, s. v. *perfidus* (a).

4) Appendix, 82.

I would like to suggest another emendation:

*formosum os tenerae decerpens ore puellae*

The following process of corruption might be assumed: at first the word *os* was omitted, and later a scribe, searching for an object of *decerpens*, changed the ablative *ore* into the accusative *ora*. It is also possible that the order was reversed, with *ore* corrupted into *ora*. There are analogies to this kind of corruption in other parts of the *Appendix*. For example, in Cat. 9,38: *mutavit placidis tempore consulibus* all the manuscripts incorrectly read *tempora* (the correction is owed to editio Aldina 1517). Or, in Mor. 34 the correct reading *pectore lata* is present only in one of mss (W), while the others have *pectora*. Especially the former example is particularly relevant to our passage of *Copa*. A scribe evidently adjusted the case of the noun to the close-standing verb *mutavit*. This shows that his corrections were, as often happens, short-sighted. A similar process might have happened in our passage: *ore* was changed into the plural accusative *ora* – the object of *decerpens* – and then *os* was omitted as redundant. Perhaps the first stage of this process was also due to the fact that a scribe had in his mind the ending of Ovid's verse: *ora puellae*.

As far as the meaning is concerned, a good analogy for *ore decerpere* can be found in Catul. 68,127 *oscula mordenti semper decerpere rostro*. It could be objected, however, that I am proposing *os*, and not *oscula*, as the object of *decerpere*, and that this word is not attested elsewhere with the meaning of 'kiss' (this objection goes also for Clausen's emendations). But the two words – *formosum* and *decerpere* – indicate that *os* does not literally mean 'kiss' here. Instead we have here a metaphor: the *viator decerpit formosum os puellae* as in Col. 9,14,18 *apes (...) decerpunt flores* ('the bees gather the nectar from the flowers') or in Plin. Nat. 21,56 *thymum et apes decerpunt* ('the bees gather the nectar from thyme'), which means, of course, that he kisses the girl, but it is said in a more sophisticated way. The quoted passages of Columella and Plinius show that the object of *decerpere* can be not only something that is 'plucked', but also the thing from which something is gathered.<sup>5</sup>

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5) See OLD, 489, s. v. *decerpo* (2).